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Johannes Lepsius: Theologian, Humanitarian Activist and Historian of *Völkermord*. An Approach to a German Biography (1858-1926)

Hans-Lukas Kieser

After having been almost forgotten for decades, the German pastor, author and activist Johannes Lepsius has in the last twenty years become a topic of heated public discussions in Germany and beyond. Among the recent bones of contention is the federally subsidized *Lepsiushaus*, that is the house of Johannes Lepsius in Potsdam, now transformed to a memorial and research center, and which is Professor Hermann Goltz's lifework. With good reason, Lepsius was and remains highly respected internationally as a humanitarian and a brave witness of truth with regard to the Armenian genocide. His commitment and his variegated life raise important questions. Can his intellectual and social biography offer new insights into a history which has all too clearly remained a site of contestation until the present day? What of his theological background and his transnational networks? What about the role of his patriotic bonds to Wilhelmine Germany? Writing in exile in Basel in 1937, a family friend, the art historian Werner Weisbach, described how the life of Lepsius was an inspiring example of truthfulness, philanthropy and patriotism. In fact, however, Lepsius found it more difficult to reconcile his various moral and religious commitments than perhaps Weisbach ever realized.

In this chapter,¹ I propose to look at Lepsius as a peculiarly German member of that otherwise largely English-speaking informal grouping of the 19th and early 20th centuries which one recent scholar has aptly termed the “Protestant International”.² I attempt to situate Lepsius' outspokenness, intellectual fabric and activism within this context, exploring how these qualities enabled him to be the most important German voice against the anti-Armenian mass crimes. After the Armenian massacres of 1895, Lepsius organized a relief network which subsequently

¹ This chapter is based on a paper given at the Workshop VII in Armenian Turkish Scholarship (University of California, Berkeley, March 4-6, 2010) and my article “Zion-Armenien-Deutschland. Johannes Lepsius und die ‘protestantische Internationale’ in der spätosmanischen Welt,” *Armenisch-Deutsche Korrespondenz* 143 (January 2009), 15–21, and no. 145 (August 2009), 21-28.

² Cf. Paul Jenkins, “The church missionary society and the Basel mission: an early experiment in inter-European co-operation,” in: *The church missionary society and world Christianity 1799–1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 42–63.

developed into his German Orient-Mission, a small member of the much larger, predominantly American Protestant mission in the Ottoman world. Child of a bourgeois and academic family, and socialized in the new Kaiserreich of 1871, Lepsius was a gifted, agile and sensitive child of the Belle Époque, acutely aware of its dynamics and illusions. As a German who lost a son at the front and as a friend of the Armenians, he experienced at close hand the Old World's descent into hell in the 1910s, and he subsequently remained long haunted by both the Armenian and German “Questions.” This was particularly the case because two crucial coordinates of his life, Wilhelmine Germany and the Protestant International, in the form it had taken in the 19th century, then came to an end. In the last decade of his life he worked feverishly as a private scholar and public intellectual in order to expose the Old World's seminal catastrophe to what he called, “the reconciling and healing power of truth.” This paper attempts to analyze the “place of production” (to use the terms of the French historian Michel de Certeau) from which Lepsius seminally spoke and articulated the late Ottoman Armenian experience for a German and international public. It reflects also on the fragility of this peculiar place.

1

Johannes Lepsius was born the youngest of six siblings into a family of distinguished academics. His father was a well-known Egyptologist; among his older brothers were Richard, a geologist who became Rector of the Technical University of Darmstadt, Bernhard, a chemist, and Reinhold, a painter. Johannes studied philosophy in Munich, graduating in 1880, at the age of 22, with a Ph.D. awarded with highest praise (*summa cum laude*). Driven by a “hunger for God” and judging a scholarly career to be “too far from life,” he decided to become a pastor. He studied theology in Greifswald and was ordained in Berlin in 1884, before leaving Germany for a job as an assistant pastor of the German parish in Jerusalem. Here he was introduced to the “Protestant International”, and came for the first time into contact with Armenians. In Jerusalem he married Margarethe Zeller, the granddaughter of Samuel Gobat, the Swiss bishop of the Anglo-Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem founded in 1841 (and abolished with Gobat's death in 1879). The milieu was transnational and polyglot; Margarethe was also an Arabic-speaker.

In organizing his system of schools, Gobat had focused on the Arabs. Against the wish of influential circles in London, he had refused to focus on conversion and publish Jewish conversion stories. In the late 19th century, there were still small missions to the Jews at work in Jerusalem, in particular the London Jews’ Society, which followed the idea of the “restoration of

Israel” and the “restoration of the Jews” to Palestine and to Jesus – the initial and driving idea of the first Protestant missionaries to Palestine in the early 19th century.³

In the Protestant International, members of the reformed churches, and particularly Americans, comprised the majority. These members had a somewhat republican idea of the Kingdom of Christ, or millennium, to be established on earth. They hoped that modernity would bring with it a new millennial age, founded on modern, even revolutionary achievements, though they proposed an evolutionary way leading to the millennium. Such belief was at odds with the German theology of the Kingdom of God, which since Luther had inclined toward a conservative, politically obedient interpretation: a tradition which drew strength during the 19th century, when democratic and radical currents in Germany, much more than in Switzerland, scandalised Bible believers with the advocacy of atheism, revolutionary violence and the end of the traditional family. Even Johann Hinrich Wichern, a friend of the Lepsius family in Berlin and founder of an important domestic mission aimed at the alleviation of poverty, was in this sense a conservative, failing or refusing to regard the French Revolution as an instance of human progress on the way to salvation.⁴

In addition to his Lutheran background, Johannes Lepsius was influenced in his relations with other Protestant Christians in Palestine also by a sense of cultural pride. As a German minoritarian among missionaries and a patriotic member of a young nation-state that was a newcomer in the global sphere, he wanted to emphasize the German contribution to theology and culture. Lepsius perhaps thus found himself at risk of Protestant culturalism or “cultural Protestantism,” of mixing pertinent historical observations with a culturalist and racial *Zeitgeist*. “The spirit of Luther and Calvin,” he wrote in 1902, enabled “the German peoples to be victorious over the Romanic world [romanische Welt],” so that “the evangelical empires of Germany, England and America presently dominate the globe.”⁵ The audacious vision of a

³ Yaron Perry, *British mission to the Jews in nineteenth-century Palestine* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); Samuel Gobat, *Samuel Gobat: evangelischer Bischof in Jerusalem: sein Leben und Wirken, meist nach seinen eigenen Aufzeichnungen* (Basel: C.F. Spitteler, 1884). Alex Carmel, *Christen als Pioniere im Heiligen Land: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Pilgermission und des Wiederaufbaus Palästinas im 19. Jahrhundert* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1981).

⁴ Cf. Mario Rainer Lepsius, “Johannes Lepsius: die Formung seiner Persönlichkeit in der Jugend- und Studienzeit,” in: Hermann Goltz (ed.), *Akten des Internationalen Dr. Johannes-Lepsius-Symposiums an der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg* (Halle/Saale: Martin-Luther-Universität, 1987) 72-93.

⁵ Johannes Lepsius, *Macht und Sittlichkeit im nationalen Leben. Reden und Abhandlungen Teil 3* (Berlin: Reich Christi-Verlag), 1902, 36 f. quoted in Andreas Baumann, *Johannes Lepsius' Missiologie*, Theological Dissertation at the University of South Africa, October 2005, 136 f.

modern global society united in social and international peace, or “realm of Christ,” thus became blurred with the culturally inflected notion of a “Christian world culture” under the spiritual fatherhood of the German Martin Luther.

In other regards, however, Lepsius closely shared the aims and values of his fellow members of the Protestant International. He accepted that the use of the English language was as necessary for the goals of the International as was Greek for Paul’s dissemination of the Gospel and, unlike most proponents of German “modern theology,” he did not suppress hope for salvific millennium and – at least at this stage – its relationship with Jewish prophecy. He believed in the historical progress of humanity “toward the union of all peoples in a realm of justice [...] under the king of Israel”, and explicitly opposed “modern theology” and “dualist orthodoxy” which in his eyes both missed the crucial link to history. “This [the realm of God] we implore, praying ‘Thy kingdom come!’”, wrote Lepsius. “Not that we come into heaven, but that heaven come on earth [...]”.

In the eyes of Lepsius and most members of the Protestant International, this prophetic prayer would remain merely utopian, however, as long as the Jews did not implement “their part”, namely a Jewish return to a Palestine homeland.⁶ But in the late 19th century Jewish Zionism replaced “Christian Zionism,” or restorationism, as the predominant “Zionist agency” in Palestine: and Lepsius became a keen observer of the movement. Personally invited by Theodor Herzl to the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, he was labeled by the press the “most diligent congress auditor.”⁷ (Herzl’s purpose in inviting the by-now renowned Lepsius was to foster ties between philarmenianism and restorationism: an ambition which would subsequently founder once Herzl began publicly to flatter Sultan Abdulhamid.) Since the early 19th century, Basel – with the Basel mission, the restorationist Association of the Friends of Israel, and many other organizations – was the hub of the Protestant International in Continental Europe. With the patriotism of the Swiss Federal State of 1848 eager to champion liberal and humanitarian universalism, Switzerland was also a European center of public activism for the humanitarian cause after the Armenian massacres: among those who participated were churches of both confessions, rabbis, free-masons and socialists – the latter including among them Rosa Luxemburg, who at the time was a student in Zurich. Albert Gobat, Samuel Gobat’s nephew, a

⁶ Johannes Lepsius, “Das Königreich Christi,” *Das Reich Christi* 3-9 (1900), 257-60, quotation 260; *Die Nachfolge Christi: Vortrag von Johannes Lepsius gehalten auf der sechsten Eisenacher Konferenz in Potsdam, 27.-29. Mai 1907* (Potsdam: Tempel-Verl., 1909), 14.

⁷ Quoted in Pierre Heumann, *Israel entstand in Basel* (Zürich: Weltwoche ABC Verlag, 1997), 97.

journalist, liberal member of the federal Parliament and co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, was a representative of that core group which also vehemently defended Abdulhamid's Young Turk Muslim opposition in Switzerland, when Istanbul put on pressure via Berlin around 1900.⁸

2

As an excellent swimmer or surfer, to put it metaphorically, Johannes Lepsius let himself willingly be caught by the deeper currents of his time, without himself elaborating a systematic ideology, theology or missiology. He thought and acted situationally, against the background of topical debates in Wilhelmine Germany, contemporary history and transnational Protestantism. To the Ottoman world he returned in the late 1890s not with a preconceived theological mission, but in order to pursue journalistic and humanitarian activities. The Armenian massacres of autumn 1895 had been a terrific drumbeat in the Belle Époque, in particular for the Protestant International whose missionaries had for more than half a century been present on the ground where the massacres were perpetrated against the people who were very closest to them.

The Palestine-centered restorationist vision of the early American missionaries had made room in the 1830s for a revised, Asia Minor-centered strategy of “revival” and empowerment of oriental, and particularly Armenian Christians together with strong support for the Tanzimat, the Ottoman reform programme. This, not “the fall of Islam” (the end of the Ottoman Empire and of Islamic power in the “bible lands”) as previously, now became topical. Though mostly non-British, the missionary community in the Ottoman capital and Asia Minor stood in close contact with the British ambassador Stratford Canning, a friend of leading Ottoman reformers. The liberal setting of the Tanzimat offered scope for the missionaries to pursue their calling in the provinces and rural regions.

After constitutional reforms in the ethnoreligious communities, or *millet*, the Tanzimat culminated in 1876 in the first Ottoman constitution and parliament.⁹ The following year, the

⁸ Hans-Lukas Kieser, “Die Schweiz des Fin de Siècle und ‘Armenien’: Patriotische Identifikation, Weltbürgertum und Protestantismus in der Schweizerischen Philarmenischen Bewegung,” in *Die Armenische Frage*, ed. Kieser (Zurich: Chronos, 1999), 133–57; *Vorkämpfer der Neuen Türkei* (Zurich: Chronos, 2005); http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1902/gobat-bio.html (visited 24 June 2010).

⁹ Cf. Safrastyan, Ruben, “Die armenischen Liberalen und die konstitutionelle Bewegung im Osmanischen Reich 1867–1876,” in *Osmanismus, Nationalismus und der Kaukasus: Muslime und Christen, Türken und Armenier im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Adanır, Fikret, und Bonwetsch, Bernd (Wiesbaden: Reichert,

young Sultan Abdulhamid II suspended both institutions while implementing a politics of Muslim empowerment in reaction both to the Christian empowerment during the *Tanzimat* and the imperial losses in the Balkans in the Russian-Ottoman war subsequently confirmed and ratified at the Berlin Congress in 1878. Cultural Protestant influence grew after the Berlin Congress in the missions on the ground, though strong transcultural impulses of the early Protestant International were not invalidated. Abdulhamid sought to propagate Muslim solidarity, loyalty to the Sultan-Caliph and the maintenance of Sunni *habitus* throughout his empire, and particularly in the mainly Kurdo-Armenian eastern provinces, which he feared losing in the same fashion as he had lost the Balkans. Macro-historical polarizations as well as growing regional Kurdo-Armenian tensions formed the background of the mass killing of Armenians by Muslims and some aggression against missionary compounds of the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioner for Foreign Missions) in 1895.¹⁰

To this event Lepsius, since 1887 a pastor of the small village of Friesdorf in eastern Germany, reacted promptly. In the guise of a carpet merchant he traveled to Anatolia in order to investigate the matter. ABCFM missionaries in Istanbul and the provinces informed and advised him. In Urfa, the future main station of the German Orientmission, the entrepreneurial pastor was welcomed by Corinna Shattuck, who briefed him on the situation. Back in Berlin and in Friesdorf, he published the book *Armenia and Europe, an indictment against the Christian Great Powers and a call to the Christian Germany* – a masterpiece of investigative journalism combined with political study.¹¹ The author holds Europe responsible for having internationally demanded reform for the Ottoman eastern provinces (article 61 of the Berlin Treaty), but not been concerned about their implementation. Lepsius hoped that Germany, a recent arrival into the international power system, would face the challenge, not shirk the teachings of the Gospel, and take it upon herself to guarantee a secure Armenian future. It was a hope in which we see combined the wish for a German share in world power and Friedrich Hölderlin's poetical vision of *Germania* as a peace-devoted priest.

2005), 153-64; Arpee, Leon, *The Armenian awakening* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1909); Artinian, Vartan, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Ermeni Anayasası'nın doğuşu 1839-1863* (Istanbul: Aras, 2004).

¹⁰ Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede. Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839–1938* (Zurich: Chronos, 2000), 114–27.

¹¹ *Armenien und Europa: Eine Anklageschrift wider die christlichen Grossmächte und ein Aufruf an das christliche Deutschland* (Berlin-Westend: Akad. Buchh. Faber, 1896).

The book was re-edited several times and published in several languages. Lepsius became a public Christian and a renowned *intellectuel engagé* who excelled as the major German voice in support of human and victims' rights in the context of the Hamidian massacres. He accused Friedrich Naumann, another pastor, politician and public figure – who had accompanied Kaiser Wilhelm on his travel to Istanbul, and wrote dismissively of the Armenians – of being an adorer of the German God Wotan instead of the universal Christ, and of following the fatal utilitarian path of *Realpolitik*.¹² He might have made similar criticisms of many others. Around this time several prominent German polemicists, sponsored at least in part by both the German and Ottoman governments, developed caustic anti-Armenian rhetoric, and public discourse saw the mutation of a recently acquired anti-Semitic repertoire into an anti-Armenian one; at the same time, as the Californian historian Margaret L. Anderson has insightfully shown, the German philarmenians were accused of anti-Semitism.¹³

Opponents attempted to discredit the philarmenian movement as irrealist or reactionary. They exploited the fact that many of the movement's most devoted members were churchgoers who argued their case in a language which might be presented as archaic or anachronistic. Many debates in this context had and preserved a theological subtext, revealing unresolved tensions over religion in Wilhelmine Germany. Concerned were on the one hand mostly conservative Christians and on the other hand self-proclaimed secularists and a popular press which tended to hold Christians in contempt. Thus a rift emerged between a network largely comprising churchgoers and a coalition of secularist, progressivist and liberal forces including within its ranks socialists, the liberal Naumann and right-wing nationalists. Rejecting appeals for German-Armenian solidarity with a welter of aggressive arguments which were variously anti-Russian, anti-British, culturalist and racist alike, this coalition of opponents failed to address the facts of the mass crime within a civil discourse. By contrast, socialists such as Eduard Bernstein and Rosa Luxemburg – and in particular the German and Swiss religious socialists – resisted anti-Christian reflexes and the temptation to play off traumatic experiences in Russia against mass crimes in the Ottoman Empire. Diverging currents clashed in Germany on the issue of solidarity with the Armenian, thus making the people feel unsure with regard to this crucial issue of ethics and solidarity with victims.

¹² Cf. Baumann, *Lepsius*, 240 f.

¹³ “‘Down in Turkey, far away’: Human Rights, the Armenian Massacres, and Orientalism in Wilhelmine Germany,” *The Journal of Modern History* 79 (March 2007): 80–111, in particular 86–102.

Germany therefore failed to assume the role envisaged by Lepsius in protecting the Armenians. Instead of joining Great Britain in pressing for reforms, it on the contrary extended support to Sultan Abdulhamid. It played down the Armenians' plight in the state-sponsored press; observed secretly all activities of Lepsius and other activists in Germany; and was anything but supportive when the first humanitarians, soon to be missionaries, traveled to the critical regions. The State Church of Magdeburg, Lepsius' employer, failed furthermore to give him the unpaid leave he had applied for in order to have a free hand. Lepsius therefore decided to leave his job, and was to remain a freelancer until his death – despite having twelve children of his own to care for. His charisma, good friends, capable collaborators, an influential social network which extended into the Berlin upper classes and, not least, two supportive wives – he remarried after Margarethe had died in 1898 – were of critical assistance in assisting him to carry on with his work.

3

Lepsius was active, not to say hyperactive as a public intellectual and theologian in Berlin and subsequently as director of a mission with stations in Ottoman Urfa, Varna in Bulgaria and Khoi in Northern Persia. After the Young Turk Revolution of 1908 he, like his American colleagues, hoped that the doors were open for a new Ottoman *Rechtsstaat* and a modern, constitutional, ethno-religious coexistence. This in fact was also the understanding of the 1907 Paris agreement between the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Committee Union and Progress which revived the political ideal of egalitarian plurality as displayed by the Tanzimat. Lepsius remained however more skeptical with regard to the future of Young Turkey than his compatriot Eugen Jäckh, an apostle and propagator of German-Turkish friendship after 1908.¹⁴ The collaborators of the Deutsche Orientmission informed him regularly and helped him to keep his eyes peeled for the realities on the ground. He liked to present the Swiss run hospital of his Deutsche Orient-Mission as at least one Ottoman microcosm in which impeccably equal coexistence among the patients was implemented.¹⁵

Since the social earthquake of 1895, Protestant missionaries had projected the Ottoman future in increasingly secularist terms of mutual respect, solidarity, responsible leadership, rights

¹⁴ Anderson, "Down in Turkey," 108.

¹⁵ Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede*, 464.

of the individual, constitutionalism etc., without altering their still predominantly post-millennialist evolutionary understanding of historical progress. Vivid theological discussions continued. At the First Missionary Conference on Behalf of the Mohammedan World, held at Cairo in 1906, many discussions went back to the foundation periods of Islam and Christianity. Lepsius argued that the early church had “made a mistake in insisting on uniformity between Jewish and Greek Christians,” that there “should have been a Jewish form of Christianity,” that “Islam is an attempt to attain that [Judeo-Christian] position – hence they are Gentile-Jews of a Gentile-Judaizing sect,” and that “in his earliest years Mohammed himself was a nominal Christian.” Consequently, the Muslims should not be approached like heathens, as was still often the case. Mission to Muslims should focus not on conversion but on “reconversion of those who have lapsed.” As the dramaturgy of conversion, a particularly powerful and sensitive evangelical pattern, was thus put into question, the “conversion of Israel,” indissolubly linked to the restorationist vision, reappeared again as the last stage of a spiritual movement from West to East, considered as characteristic of the modern age. This movement would take place after a reform of Islam, Lepsius postulated in his paper, presenting Islam as a “Judeo-Christian sect”; a kind of a third, global millennial covenant, out of the first (Hebrew) and second (Christian), was to come which, despite its ostensible flaws, historical Islam had powerfully prefigured.¹⁶

The missionary community knew strikingly little about Muslim eschatology. Lepsius was however eager to learn more about Islam and thought that others in Germany should do the same. Together with a number of ex-Muslim teachers, he thus founded an *Islamseminar* in Potsdam. A lack of resources and demand meant that this ran only briefly. But Lepsius nevertheless acquired a more sophisticated approach to Muslim topics¹⁷ than he displayed during his campaigns in the late 1890s when traditional stereotypes on Islam in the mass movement had been latent and patent – while the opponents of solidarity with the Armenians had used anti-ecclesiastical and latent anti-Christian – such as social Darwinist or racial – arguments.

¹⁶ *Methods of mission work among Moslems*. Being those papers read at the First Missionary Conference on behalf of the Mohammedan World held at Cairo April 4th–9th, 1906, and the discussions thereon, which by order of the conference were not to be issued to the public, but were to be privately printed for the use of missionaries and the friends of missions (London: Fleming H. Revell company, n.d. [1906]), 23-26.

¹⁷ A factor to be particularly considered is Lepsius’ acquaintance with Johannes Awetarianian alias Muhammed Shukru, a converted Muslim, probably an Alevi, whom he deeply respected and from which he learnt more about Muslim religion and Sufi spirituality. Awetarianian became a collaborator of Lepsius’ *Orient-Mission* in the early 1900s and led its station in Varna. Cf. Gabriel Goltz, *Eine christlich-islamische Kontroverse um Religion, Nation und Zivilisation: die osmanisch-türkischen Periodika der Deutschen Orient-Mission und die Zeitung “Balkan” in Plovdiv 1908-1911* (Hamburg: Lit, 2002).

Distancing themselves from European imperialism, the American missionaries set on peaceful U.S. agency, Lepsius on German agency beyond, as both hoped, the pernicious imperialist competition for power in the Old World and for global influence. Despite his own recent disappointment with the German government, Lepsius again projected his fatherland as a decisive force of peace and suggested that Germany alone did not pursue aggressive and divisive aims on behalf of the fragile new Turkey. “Could German intellect and genius not make much bigger peaceful conquests across all fields of culture in the Orient?” he asked in 1908, adding that all European influence would have destructive consequences, Germany's military support included, if not linked to roots in the Gospel and a peaceful vision for the Ottoman world. Ottoman patriotism was still weak; ethno-religious gaps had to be bridged. Like most members of the Ottoman missionary community, Lepsius strongly condemned the attack of a coalition of Balkan states on Ottoman Turkey and European passivity in autumn 1912. In his eyes, such martial dynamics contradicted both German interests and a Gospel-inspired attitude which had to put all its efforts and genius in overcoming evil by good. In an article of 1913 entitled “Turkey's future,” in *Der Christliche Orient*, the journal of his Deutsche Orient-Mission, he declared resolutely that “nobody should wonder that we advocate Turkey's preservation.”¹⁸

Though he had resisted Jäckh's enthusiastic embrace of Young Turkey, Lepsius longed for a synergy of his own commitment for Turkey and the *Orientpolitik* of a Germany in whose constructive potential he deeply believed. The American senior partners began to feel clearly the new national self-affirmation among German missions in Asia Minor after 1910.¹⁹ Lepsius wanted to see the good, not the dark side of the *Orientpolitik*: the Baghdad railway's striking advantages as a bridge between Europe and Asia and a powerful lever for development – not its attraction for dangerous political ambitions, combined to a race of armament. He emphasized the fresh, efficient and ingenuous approach of the newcomer, not the culturally arrogant, immodest,

¹⁸ *Der Christliche Orient* 12 (1911), 90-93; 13 (1912), 123; 13 (1912), 86.

¹⁹ ABCFM member Henry Riggs commented on this German turn: “[...] there had begun to appear, among German workers, a force at work which, in spite of and overruling the individual ideals of many of the German missionaries, insisted in the German demand for infiltration and for holding on to every strategic point once occupied” (*A.B.C.F.M. History 1910-1942. Section on the Turkey missions*, Typoskript [1942], chap. 1: The Turkey missions in 1910, 10, Archives of the ABCFM, Houghton Library Ms. Hist.). Cf. Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede*, 464; cf. also in general Malte Fuhrmann, *Der Traum vom deutschen Orient: zwei deutsche Kolonien im Osmanischen Reich 1851-1918* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2006).

unsure Kaiserreich and the world power-oriented, social Darwinist mindset of an important part of its elite. Such vices he saw above all among Germany's opponents.

Lepsius was the representative of the German-Armenian committee. Similar committees in different European countries backed a renewed diplomatic effort, initiated by Armenian representatives, to implement the reforms according to article 61 of the Berlin Treaty in 1913. Russia as the neighbor of the concerned provinces had to take the lead. Germany followed willingly in order both to preserve its interests and to convince the Ottoman government of the issue's sincerity. Thus Lepsius' long expected synthesis between *Orientpolitik* and *Orientmission*, between Germany's interests and a modern reading of the Gospel came into reach. In fact in the first half of 1913, German diplomacy undertook a fundamental change in its hitherto passive and conniving approach to the Armenian question which it finally submitted to the reluctant Kaiser.²⁰ In an important report of February 24, 1913 the German Ambassador to the Ottoman Capital Wangenheim considered the main Armenian wishes to be justified, and suggested that the “German press would have to give up its previous negative attitude towards everything Armenian.” In a later report, he critically revisited the massacres of the 1890s – which the German government had tried to suppress in diplomacy and press.²¹ Appreciative articles all of a sudden sympathetic to the Armenians began to appear in the German press in spring 1913, including articles written by friends of Lepsius.²² The landing of German warships and the visits by German commanders to governors and, most notably, Armenian notables in Adana and Mersin in April 1913 were understood among Ottomans as signs of change.²³ Thus Germany became a crucial partner to Russia for the reform negotiations in the second half of 1913 that led to the plan of February 8, 1914.

²⁰ Der Staatssekretär des Auswärtigen Amtes (Jagow) an den Kaiser (Wilhelm II), 9 June 1913, PA-AA/R14079/MF7092/61-65. The German documentation on this reform issue is in PA-AA/R14077–14084 of the German State Archives (PA-AA meaning Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes = Political Archive of the Foreign Ministry). I thank Wolfgang Gust for giving me access to his digitalized edition even before publication.

²¹ PA-AA/R14078, quoted according to the internet edition on www.armenocide.de (established by Wolfgang and Sigrid Gust) which includes the English translation for this piece; Wangenheim to Reichskanzler, 23 June 1913, PA-AA/R14079/MF7094/06-10. PA-AA documents are quoted according to the internet edition except the documents mentioned in the previous footnote.

²² E.g. Paul Rohrbach, “Basra – Kuwait,” *Frankfurter Zeitung* 27 May 1913, in Rohrbach to Zimmermann, 22 June 1913, PA-AA/R14079/MF7093/65-75.

²³ State Secretary Jagow to Kaiser, 9 June 1913, PA-AA/R14079/MF7092/61-65; Das Kommando der Mittelmeerdivision (Trummel) an den Kaiser, 28 May 1913, PA-AA/R14079/MF7093/30-45.

As the delegate of the German-Armenian committee, Lepsius received relevant Armenian papers, attended the delegates' meetings, including with European diplomats, and maintained contact with André Mandelstam, a lawyer and dragoman of the Russian Embassy in Istanbul, who drew the first draft of the reform plan in June 1913.²⁴ Mandelstam was a friend of Krikor Zohrab, himself a lawyer, author and independent Armenian Ottoman deputy. Lepsius reported on his meetings to the German Foreign Office and sent documents that emphasized the necessity of reform and action. He had a few informal meetings with state secretaries in Berlin. A first meeting took place with vice secretary of state Zimmermann in January 1913, together with Garabed Thoumajan, the delegate of the London committee.²⁵ For the first time, an open synergy between the German government and transnational networks, established during and after the massacres of the 1890s, began. To this synergy the NGO networks contributed grassroots experiences, knowhow and much hope and goodwill for the future – though importantly and unfortunately without strong Muslim partners on the ground. Johannes Lepsius and his German collaborators felt inspired to start for new horizons of, as they hoped for, a peacefully combined *Orientmission* and *Orientpolitik*. In this German Protestant vision of Ottoman Asia Minor the Armenians again had to be – as had already been the case with the Americans' Armeno-centric revival strategy of the Tanzimat – the main agents of modern change in Turkey.

The staff of the German Foreign Office obeyed, first of all, a new assessment of German interests in Asia Minor following a change in international diplomacy during the Balkan war – after the ARF's rupture with the CUP in summer 1912 and correlatedly the Armenian decision to bring the reform issue again in diplomacy via Russia. German and Russian diplomacy now established an efficient and sincere cooperation “against the grain,” against the macro-alliances of the Great Powers as established since the Triple Entente of 1907. The “loyalty of the government in St. Petersburg is beyond all doubt in this matter,” Wangenheim cabled to the *Reichskanzler* on November 15, 1913, at the same time informing him of contrary propaganda.²⁶ Even if the (incomplete) rupture between ARF and CUP in 1912, the Balkan wars and the establishment of the CUP's single party dictatorship in 1913 had cast a dark cloud over the Ottoman future, a really new perspective opened now. At last, both the core issue of the Oriental Question in Belle Époque diplomacy, the implementation of article 61, and the way for “radical reform in the

²⁴ Wangenheim to Foreign Office, 23 June 1913, PA-AA/R14079/MF7093/84-87.

²⁵ Zimmermann to Lepsius, 22 April 1913, PA-AA/R14078/MF7089/40.

²⁶ PA-AA/R14082. Cf. however Joseph Pomiankowski, *Der Zusammenbruch des Osmanischen Reiches: Erinnerungen an die Türkei aus der Zeit des Weltkrieges* (Zürich: Amalthea-Verlag, 1928), 163.

modern sense” (Wangenheim on February 24) of *Rechtsstaat* in Anatolia, the heart of the Ottoman state since 1878, seemed to be paved. No plausible alternative to the plan appeared to be conceivable, if not bloodshed.²⁷ After trying to ignore Armenian pleas and to throw in its lot with Ottoman “anti-imperialism,” even the reluctant German diplomacy had made a turn. Bismarck had been skeptical about any German involvement in the “Orient,” judging the Oriental Question to be a bottomless pit and article 61 pure cosmetics.²⁸

Two German-Ottoman friendship associations were founded in the first half of 1914, the Deutsch-Türkische Vereinigung by Ernst Jäckh, and the Deutsch-Armenische Gesellschaft by Lepsius, both sponsored by the German Foreign Office and aimed at supporting the diplomatic turn.²⁹ Against the background of Bismarck and previous Wilhelmine connivance with Ottoman resistance against reform, the belated German re-positioning was fragile. It attempted a “just and moderate viewpoint,” as Wangenheim argued when the Grand Vizier complained that Germany had turned from the Muslims to the Armenians.³⁰ The Young Turk signers of the project were, to say the least, not convinced of the reform plan. They and their press were angry that, as Wangenheim put it, “if implemented evenhandedly,” the plan would make “the Armenian brain prevail over the Ottoman fist.”³¹ The Christians on the ground and their leaders felt more than anyone else the added suspicion and anti-Christian resentments among Muslim leaders who, for several reasons, proved neither willing nor capable to implement reforms that combined equality with plurality.

4

The plan began to be dismantled in August 1914, though the German diplomats involved scarcely realized this. In contrast to the speedy German-Ottoman negotiations leading to the treaty of August 2, Russia insisted on the continuation of the Armenian Reforms in the case of an alliance, after Enver had duplicitously started talks with Russian representatives on an alliance with the

²⁷ Roderic H. Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774–1923: The impact of the West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 180-205.

²⁸ Quoted in Norbert Saupp, *Das Deutsche Reich und die armenische Frage* (Köln: n.p., 1990), 30.

²⁹ *Deutschland, Armenien und die Türkei 1895-1925. Thematisches Lexikon*, ed. Hermann Goltz and Axel Meissner (München: Saur, 2004), 35-36, 122-123, 246.

³⁰ Wangenheim to Foreign Office, 6 June 1913, PA-AA/R14079/MF7092/34-47.

³¹ Wangenheim to Reichskanzler, 23 November 1913, PA-AA/R14082/MF7105/74-84.

Entente on August 5.³² On August 6, Wangenheim accepted six proposals, among them the abolition of the capitulations and “a small correction of her [Turkey's] eastern border which shall place Turkey into direct contact with the Moslems of Russia.”³³ The mobilization and the requisition, which hit in particular the Christians, began in early August. It seriously disturbed the already fragile social peace. It had, as Enver Pasha stated to his confidant Hans Humann, the navy attaché of the German Embassy, “to advance the people's *völkisch* [ethnonationalist Turkist] education.” For another colleague of Enver, Joseph Pomiankowski, the Austrian military attaché, the intention to eliminate the Armenian question had had “an important influence” upon the régime's decision for war at the side of the Triple Alliance. The Germans who had been involved in the reform negotiations did not anticipate, let alone actively prevent this worst case.³⁴

Johannes Lepsius stated with satisfaction in July that in Germany “the judgment on the Armenians had fundamentally [and positively] changed” – whereas in October 1914, Max von Oppenheim, the author of a seminal Foreign Office memorandum entitled *Revolutionizing the Islamic Possessions of Our Enemies*, used again highly depreciatory language when speaking of the Armenians and other Oriental Christians.³⁵ In contrast to experienced American missionaries on the ground in eastern Anatolia, Lepsius was not aware of the dangerous implications of the mobilization.³⁶ During what has aptly been called the fundamentally wrong “Whitsun event” of August 1914 (to be repeated in 1933), in whose *Burgfrieden* Germany's intelligentsia, churches and, in 1914, synagogues pathetically claimed the rightfulness and morality of Germany's war,³⁷ Lepsius demanded the victory of German world power together with the victory of the Gospel of

³² Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman road to war in 1914: the Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107-108 and 127-130.

³³ Ulrich Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1918*, Princeton: Princeton University press, 1968, 28.

³⁴ Pomiankowski, *Zusammenbruch*, 162-163.

³⁵ Gottfried Hagen, “German heralds of holy war: Orientalists and applied oriental studies,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24 no. 2 (2004), 149-150.

³⁶ Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Nearest East. American millennialism and mission to the Middle East* (Philadelphia: TUP, 2010), 84–85.

³⁷ Manfred Gailus, *Protestantismus und Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Durchdringung des protestantischen Sozialmilieus in Berlin* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 637-66. For Jewish-orthodox alliance with the zeitgeist of German war ideology see Margit Schad, “Die bedrohten ‘Gottesgüter’ in die neue, ‘deutsche’ Zeit retten. Selig Schachnowitz und die orthodoxe jüdische Kriegsdeutung in Frankfurt am Main 1914–1918,” In *Geistliche im Krieg*, ed. F. Brendle and A. Schindling (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2009), 265–290, especially 288.

Jesus Christ – and did not realize that in those same weeks the vision of his life was being reduced to a shambles.

This is a strong hint at the immaturity of his pre-War synthesis of Orientmission and Orientpolitik. In early World War I, another pastor and young member of the Socialist Party, shocked by the war propaganda of his former professors at German universities and other intellectuals, threw overboard the theology he had learnt there, now labeling most of it “cultural Protestantism.”³⁸ Would he, the theologian Karl Barth, have included Lepsius' missionary approach of 1913–1914 in this category? Protestant culturalism, the “we” of the Burgfrieden and the abridged geostrategic thinking of the Wilhelmine intelligentsia left its mark on Lepsius beyond the 1910s. At the same time, he vigorously tried again and again, in an indefatigable struggle, to break out of the cage, once he had, in June 1915, begun to understand the dramatic Armenian reality and the unresponsiveness of his home country.

Germany's last best chance to prevent the Armenian genocide would arguably have been in spring 1915, when after the first victory at the Dardanelles on March 18 the Turkish elite's depression following serious defeats turned to chauvinist exuberance and the anti-Armenian atmosphere began to condense. This was linked to events in Zeytun and Dörtyol. German diplomacy was informed in time by Jelal Bey, the Vali of Aleppo, that “in the Turkish government a current is gaining the upper hand which is inclined to consider all Armenians as suspicious or even hostile. He [Jelal] thinks of this development as a misfortune for his fatherland and begged me to persuade His Excellency the Imperial Ambassador to counteract this trend.”³⁹ German diplomacy could have emphasized leading German agency for the first Ottoman victory at the Dardanelles and for the further defense of the Ottoman capital. It could have made clear that, against the CUP's contrary policy since August 1914, it remained committed to the Armenian reforms of 1914, vetoed henceforth any anti-Armenian steps and did even not fear a break of the alliance. This would have been unconventional – in contrast to a condoned “hard, but

³⁸ Cf. Barth's later *Protestant theology in the nineteenth century: Its background and history* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans publishing, 2002, 1st German ed., 1946, going back to lecture courses in Interwar Germany).

³⁹ German consul in Aleppo Walter Rössler to Bethmann-Hollweg, 12 April 1915, DE/PA-AA/R14085, (www.armenocide.de, English translation on the site).

useful” extermination (Humann, mid-June 1915) of those whom Germany had declared a few months previously to be its partners on the ground.⁴⁰

Like German diplomacy, Lepsius himself has been late in understanding or being ready to understand. After relevant articles in the Swiss press and a warning declaration by the Entente had already been published in May 1915,⁴¹ he was finally invited in early June to the Foreign Office in Berlin to read a telegram by Wangenheim of May 31. The telegram resumed Enver's urgent request of German appreciation of his plan “to resettle in Mesopotamia all those families from the recently insurgent Armenian centres which are considered to be not quite unobjectionable.” Though he wrote that Enver Pasha put “the state of war (emergency) forward as a pretext” for these measures, Wangenheim asked “to inform Professor [sic] Lepsius and other German Armenian committees correspondingly and make it clear to them that, unfortunately, the measures mentioned are unavoidable in view of Turkey’s political and military position.”⁴² Wangenheim's approval of limited removal – to be confirmed in the faint-hearted memorandum of July 4 –⁴³ was a breakthrough for a regime which a few months previously had found itself strictly bound to implement a monitored coexistence of Christians and Muslims, Armenians, Syriacs, Kurds and Turks in eastern Asia Minor.

Lepsius now understood. For Wangenheim it seems to have taken two weeks more.⁴⁴ This architect of the diplomatic turn of 1913 and, though first reluctantly, of the war alliance, must have felt abused, tricked and exposed as the representative of a troubled and incoherent world power. Though he now sent clear-cut reports to Berlin, these were concerned first of all for Germany's prestige and interests, not the victims. In contrast, in early June an outraged consul in Aleppo Walter Rössler had asked Wangenheim to intervene for the first deportees arriving in Aleppo, informing him that the fore-mentioned governor, Jelal, a man sympathetic to the

⁴⁰ Humann quoted in Hilmar Kaiser, “Die deutsche Diplomatie und der armenische Völkermord.” In: *Osmanismus, Nationalismus und der Kaukasus. Muslime und Christen, Türken und Armenier im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Fikret Adanır and Bernd Bonwetsch (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005), 213-214.

⁴¹ Christoph Dinkel, “Die schweizerische Armenierhilfe. Chronik von 1896 bis in die Zwischenkriegszeit.” In: *Die armenische Frage und die Schweiz (1896-1923)*, ed. H. Kieser (Zürich: Chronos, 1999), 195.

⁴² Wangenheim to Foreign Office, 31 May 1915, PA-AA/R14086 (www.armenocide.de, including English translation).

⁴³ Enclosed in Ambassador in Constantinople to the Reichskanzler, July 1915, DE/PA-AA/R14086.

⁴⁴ Wangenheim to Bethmann-Holweg, 17 June, PA-AA/R14086 (www.armenocide.de, incl. English translation).

Armenians' plight, was being sacked and that a special CUP envoy had taken power.⁴⁵ Lepsius too was alarmed in early June and ready to travel to Turkey.⁴⁶ His collaborator Jakob Künzler in Urfa had already on his own initiative gone to Rössler in Aleppo in order to awaken the German diplomacy in mid-June; there he also spoke with Oppenheim though he knew him “not to be a friend of the Armenians.”⁴⁷ Lepsius stopped on his way from Berlin via Geneva and Basel to Istanbul in July 1915 in Bucharest and Sofia where reports from Armenians convinced him definitively that “a systematic annihilation of the Armenian population in the interior” took place.⁴⁸ The death of his 21 year old “favorite son and hoped for successor” Gerhard at the eastern front contributed to his commotion in July 1915.⁴⁹ On July 24 he arrived in Istanbul.

Again, as in 1896, he began systematically to collect material. He visited the Armenian patriarch Der Yeghiayan Zaven, the American missionaries, firstly William W. Peet, the treasurer of the ABCFM, the US ambassador Henry Morgenthau and German diplomats. On August 10 he had a memorable conversation with Enver Pasha that destroyed his last doubts about the exterminatory intentions of the CUP. Back in Europe he first went to inform his friends in Geneva and Basel, collaborating in particular with Albert Oeri, an editor at the *Basler Nachrichten* and brother of Gertrud Vischer-Oeri who was the wife of Andreas Vischer, the doctor of the Urfa hospital.⁵⁰ Enriched by the reports of other compatriots on the ground, the Swiss press now published more and more precise articles. Lepsius was denounced by the German Vice-Consul in Basel to Bethmann Hollweg as an agitator who damaged Germany's interests.⁵¹ A few months later Jäckh – together with such diverse people as Oppenheim, Naumann, Alexander Parvus Helphand and Erwin Nossig, a propagator of the Turco-German war

⁴⁵ 3 June and 6 June 1915, PA-AA/BoKon/169.

⁴⁶ Johannes Lepsius, *Der Todesgang des armenischen Volkes: Bericht über das Schicksal des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei während des Weltkrieges* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), v-vii.

⁴⁷ Jakob Künzler, *Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen: Erlebnisse in Mesopotamien während des Weltkrieges (1914-1918)* (Zürich: Chronos, 1999), 39 f. Cf. Consul in Aleppo (Roessler) to the Reichskanzler, 29 June 1915, DE/PA-AA/R14086.

⁴⁸ Lepsius in the preface of the second edition of 1919 of *Der Todesgang des armenischen Volkes: Bericht über das Schicksal des armenischen Volkes in der Türkei während des Weltkrieges* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), v-vii.

⁴⁹ Goltz/Meissner, *Thematisches Lexikon*, 310.

⁵⁰ Goltz/Meissner, *Thematisches Lexikon*, 387; *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D6459.php> (visited 24 June 2010).

⁵¹ Basel, 22 September 1915, PA-AA/R14087.

effort – demanded in the name of his German-Turkish Association at the German Service Abroad (Auslanddienst) that Lepsius be refused access to Switzerland.⁵²

Back from Basel in Berlin, Lepsius tried to move heaven and earth to awaken the German public and political sphere, and to organize help for the surviving Armenians. In the September-October issue of Lepsius' mission journal *Der Christliche Orient* his German readers learnt for the first time in a “Distress Call” that a catastrophe had happened. Lepsius mobilized networks and gave public talks. Although he and his friends felt that the condoned massacre “broke the moral neck to the alliance with Turkey” (Paul Rohrbach, member of the executive of the Deutsche Orient-Mission), they remained tributary to the public logics of war. Still supporting the alliance as “vital” for Germany, Lepsius argued in a talk in Berlin in October 1915 that “in Constantinople we must with more power than now prevent that we lose the crop of the war in Asia Minor.” Lamenting the disastrous impact upon Turkey's economy, he was replied to by Julius Kaliski, a socialist, that the Ottoman Armenians would easily be replaced by Jews; and the socialist Max Grunwald argued that “one must observe Marx's guiding principle that historical development moves according to its own laws. If one wanted to apply European concepts of morality and politics to Turkish conditions, one would arrive at a completely distorted judgment.”⁵³

A few weeks earlier, an influential socialist and informal collaborator of the German Foreign Office, who had come back from a long stay in Istanbul (and would co-organize in 1917 Lenin's travel to St. Petersburg), proclaimed in his freshly launched journal: “We do not want to be influenced in our judgment by considerations for friends or comrades, not even by the pity for poor and persecuted people.” German military power in his, Parvus', as he claimed “scientific” perspective, had alone to bring about Russia's defeat and a socialist world revolution, including in Germany; since 1910 he had proclaimed the necessity of world war. Strauss, another collaborator of the Foreign Office, wrote from Istanbul that “this extermination of a rebellious Turcophobe

⁵² 31 July 1916, LAH (Dr. Johannes-Lepsius-Archiv an der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg) 13825. Cf. Hans-Walter Schmuhl, “Friedrich Naumann und die 'armenische Frage'. Die deutsche Öffentlichkeit und die Verfolgung der Armenier vor 1915.” In: *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah / The Armenian genocide and the Shoah*, ed. H.L. Kieser and D.J. Schaller (Zürich: Chronos, 2002), 503-16; Ernst Jäckh, *Das grössere Mitteleuropa: ein Werkbund-Vortrag* (Weimar: Kiepenheuer, 1916).

⁵³ Kaliski quotation Ernst Jäckh-Papers Yale University Library, quoted in Kieser, “Dr Reshid.” In *The Armenian genocide and the Shoah*; Rohrbach and Grunwald quotations: Ernst Jäckh-Papers Yale University Library (Grunwald quoted in Anderson, “Down in Turkey,” 85). Lepsius quotation: LAH 1070.

and Anglophile human race, which had been stirred up by foreign money, could be the first step toward the amelioration of the economic situation” in Turkey.⁵⁴

In short, radically unethical discourse from the left and the right accompanied the German dismissal of the Armenians. It implied the endorsement or acceptance of the concept of a revolutionary Turkish “national economy,” *millî iktisad*, and its straightforward destruction of “compradore bourgeoisie” – a conceptualization to which Parvus had seminally contributed with pre-War articles in the Turkist press.⁵⁵ Germany was morally deeply confused. A militarist right; submissive war preachers in the churches since the August 14 “Whitsun”; and a war-oriented left had all publicly contributed to this. The latter cultivated a revolutionary interior and exterior agenda and anti-Armenian comments that disparagingly ripped into the religious heart of the mainly Christian solidarity with the Armenian victims in Germany. Germany had lost its soul – its credibility, faith and capacity for solidarity. The convinced patriot and Protestant German Lepsius felt this most likely more than anyone else.

When Lepsius invited mission and church representatives to a meeting in Berlin, also in October 1915, he had more appreciative listeners, but they were timid, reticent and little eloquent. He showed them his material and initiated a petition to the Chancellor. On November 12 Bethmann-Hollweg answered it politely but evasively. Nevertheless the government stood henceforth under more pressure to act in favor of the Armenian victims and to facilitate humanitarian help.⁵⁶ This the more so, as on October 11, Friedrich Schuchardt, the director of the German Hülfsbund, a pietist sister organization of the Deutsche Orient-Mission, had asked the Foreign Office for a travel permit in order to “visit our stations in the centre of Asia Minor and, together with our brothers and sister of the mission, to find a way of bringing practical and spiritual help to the Armenians in the so-called concentration camps in the region of Aleppo and Urfa.”⁵⁷ The German Embassy then opposed this idea, saying it would be understood politically

⁵⁴ Strauss quotation in Christian Gerlach, “Nationsbildung im Krieg: Wirtschaftliche Faktoren bei der Vernichtung der Armenier und beim Mord an den ungarischen Juden.” In *The Armenian genocide and the Shoah*, 382-383; Parvus, *Die Glocke* no. 1, 1 September 1915, 2.

⁵⁵ Muammer Sencer, *Türkiye'nin malî tutsaklığı. Parvus efendi* (Istanbul: May, 1977; Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de “millî iktisat” 1908-1918* (Ankara: Yurt, 1982).

⁵⁶ LAH 6508; COJL Nov.-Dez. 1915, 87; Reichskanzler to German Embassy in Istanbul, 10 November 1915, PA-AA/BoKon/171; *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918: Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke*, ed. Johannes Lepsius (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), 183-190.

⁵⁷ Enclosed in German Foreign Office to Ambassador Wangenheim, 15 October 1915, PA-AA/BoKon/171.

and because “resources would be wasted without us gaining anything”.⁵⁸ Nevertheless Schuchardt obtained a travel permit, but only as far as Constantinople. German diplomacy understood that German help for starving Armenians was important for publicity in the West, but it should not be revealed to the Turks.⁵⁹ The teacher Beatrice Rohner, a member of the German Hilfsbund, was called to the Ottoman capital for secret talks with German and American missionary leaders, after their previous meetings with German diplomats and U.S. Ambassador Morgenthau. Introduced and helped by local Armenians in Aleppo, in particular the pastor Hovhannes Eskidjian, she set up in early 1916 legal orphanages in the town and began to communicate illegally via disguised envoys with the deportees in the camps. This work was backed by the German and U.S. consulates in Aleppo and mainly sponsored by American and Swiss networks both in Aleppo and in the home countries. The money collected by Lepsius went to his collaborators in Urfa whose humanitarian work on behalf of Armenian women and orphans and Kurdish deportees was nevertheless again mainly sponsored by the Swiss and the newly founded American Near East Relief.⁶⁰ In the early 1920s, Lepsius' collaborators in Urfa Karen Jeppe and Elisabeth and Jakob Künzler would become employees of the NER.

Beside meetings, conferences and lobbying activities in Germany, Lepsius began to establish a substantial report on the situation of the Armenians in Turkey. Again an outstanding and lasting piece of investigative journalism, it was published in July 1916 in his own Tempelverlag in Potsdam after other publishers had declined for political reasons.⁶¹ Parts of Lepsius' report had circulated since autumn 1915 and were probably also given to the socialist of the left wing and deputy Karl Liebknecht. On December 18 and 20, 1915, Liebknecht interpellated the chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg on the issue of the removal and massacres. In a notice of December 17, on a report from the ambassador in Istanbul, the chancellor had already made clear however that he not only disapproved of any pressure, but also of any open criticism

⁵⁸ Wangenheim, 21 October, PA-AA/BoKon/171, and Neurath, 26 October, PA-AA/R14088.

⁵⁹ Metternich, German Embassy, to Reichskanzler Bethmann Hollweg, 17 February 1916, PA-AA/R14090. Cf. Kaiser, *Crossroads*, 35.

⁶⁰ Hilmar Kaiser, *At the crossroads of Der Zor. Death, survival, and humanitarian resistance* (Princeton N.J.: Taderon, 2001), 33-38; Hans-Lukas Kieser, “La missionnaire Beatrice Rohner face au génocide des Arméniens.” In: *La résistance aux génocides. De la diversité des actes de sauvetage*, ed. Sémelin, Jacques (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2008), 383-98; Kieser *Der verpasste Friede*, 348-355 and 482-487.

⁶¹ Johannes Lepsius, *Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes in der Türkei* (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1916). Cf. Goltz, *Thematisches Lexikon*, 72-74.

of the ally in this issue.⁶² Liebknecht met with amusement while defending his interpellation in the Reichstag on January 11, 1916, and was silenced when explicitly referring to Lepsius and Lepsius' conclusion that a veritable extermination was taking place.⁶³

The committee members of the Deutsche Orient-Mission did not back Lepsius in his public activities. Influential people in the church, in the Foreign Office and in public life began to discredit him as an agitator, a “bad angel” and a “fanatic” who violated censorship regulations and stabbed the back of the German war effort.⁶⁴ Lepsius however insisted that the “imperative of humanity” compelled him and that this imperative could under no circumstances be postponed or sacrificed.⁶⁵ Together with a few friends he sent his report to politicians, pastors and interested individuals in and outside Germany. The book was soon confiscated. In summer 1916 he moved to Holland where, far from the political and psychological pressure in Berlin he continued his activities and earned some urgently needed money as a part-time reporter of the foreign press for the Military Bureau (Militärische Stelle) of the Foreign Office. Opportunity, pragmatic constraints and a display of patriotic duty most likely played together in this move. To be researched is his implication there in international efforts for a compromise peace (Verständigungsfrieden) in collaboration with Kurt Hahn, a Jewish friend, who then worked at the Military Bureau and helped Lepsius to have the job in Holland, and the extent to which on the contrary he may have obeyed the *Siegefrieden* rationale of the Military Bureau's superiors.

In contrast to most German intellectuals and spokespersons, Lepsius possessed long term channels of communication, collaboration and solidarity to Switzerland and the French- and English-speaking worlds. Most, though not all of them, could be attributed to the Protestant International. Without these channels and their backing he would scarcely have had the courage to articulate his conscience and at least partly resist the powerful group dynamics in the German capital. What he published was a nuisance that additionally disturbed an already distressed German public. The distress could however have been a chance. In the house of Werner Weisbach in Berlin, who felt this double distress, the peace-oriented Vereinigung Gleichgesinnter

⁶² Note on a report of 7 December 1915 by Ambassador Metternich who had replaced the deceased Wangenheim, PA-AA/R14089.

⁶³ Interpellation by Karl Liebknecht, Member of the Reichstag, in the 26th Session of the Reichstag, 11 January 1915, PA-AA/R14089.

⁶⁴ The later foreign minister Frederic Hans von Rosenberg, in: Der Minister der geistlichen und Unterrichts-Angelegenheiten an den Staatssekretär des Auswärtigen Amts (Zimmermann), 14 February 1917, DE/PA-AA/R14095; Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede*, 354 f.

⁶⁵ Lepsius, *Bericht über die Lage des Armenischen Volkes*, v.

was founded.⁶⁶ Added to the holocaust of millions of young men in Europe, the Armenian catastrophe was a strong argument for a quick peace without victory in concordance with Woodrow Wilson's peace initiative of 1916.

This main initiative however failed like those proposed by the Pope and the socialists. Wilson stood close to the networks of the Protestant International; representatives of the missionary community formed, as the historian John Grabill has labeled it, his informal cabinet for Middle Eastern affairs, including at the Paris peace conference after 1918. In the late 1910s, the Protestant International went openly political as never before. Lepsius put his hope on its postulates – to be deeply disappointed when in Paris Wilson's initial ideas for Europe, Germany and the Middle East remained an utopia. Members of the Protestant International warned of a new world war to come and lamented the lack of responsibility among politicians in Europe and the U.S. They fell silent when their political visions had failed.⁶⁷ How to display after World War I the evolutionary optimism inherent to post-millennialism? In modern continental Europe it had in any case always had a difficult and marginal stand.

5

The failure of the Protestant International's political commitment coincided with its actual end – though it survived in many successive and sub-networks, e.g. reduced missions, the NER (founded and first run by the missionary community), the ecumenical movement, and the YMCA. The seminal transnational network, which can be labeled Protestant International, had since the late 18th century been most visible as a global mission. After its unsuccessful peace initiatives and the failed implementation of its political visions after World War I, it definitively lost its hitherto formative post-millennialist breadth and theology.

As a member of the Wilhelmine elite Johannes Lepsius was deeply troubled after the lost World War. For all those who had aspired to a “fair share” of world power and the predominance of so-called German high culture including Christian tradition, the abyss was deep. His Orientmission cum Orientpolitik had been embedded in that lost framework though it had aspired

⁶⁶ To which also Albert Einstein belonged. Werner Weisbach, *“Und alles ist zerstoben”: Erinnerungen aus der Jahrhundertwende* (Wien: Reichner, 1937), 381; Hubert Goenner, *Einstein in Berlin: 1914-1933* (München: C.H. Beck, 2005), 100 f.

⁶⁷ Joseph L. Grabill, “Missionary influence on American relation with the Near East: 1914-1923,” *The Muslim World*, 32 (1968), 43-56 and 141-154, in particular 153; Kieser, *Nearest East*, 93–102.

to other horizons. Most importantly, Lepsius had lost by and large the implicit backbone of his transnational orientation since his days as a young pastor in Jerusalem, the Protestant International, and the related “oriental project” that had driven him. In continental Europe, Bolshevism and a (counter-)revolutionary right dominated the arena – both unhappily converging in social engineering, Darwinist approaches to human society and a perverted millennialism. In Germany, destructive thinking, self-hate cum self-pity, sweeping allegations and anti-Semitism lurked in an exhausted formerly (culturally) Christian society now marked by aporia and disruption. In this situation, when acting out of concern for and loyalty to the Armenian victims, forgetting his own German condition and former expectations, Lepsius did the best, the most effective and most brilliant. “As bad as it looks in our own country, our misery can not be compared to this genocide [“Völkermord” in the German original] which the Young Turks have on their conscience,” he wrote in 1919 in the preface of his re-edited report of 1916 entitled *The Way to Death of the Armenian People*.⁶⁸ When he let himself be overstrained, or exploited, in the belief that he must fulfill patriotic duties, Lepsius' mind became troubled, though his ethical references did not break down.

For serious-minded Christians and pastors in Europe who wanted to have a say for the people after World War I, the major challenge was to affirm, instead of a moloch and juggernaut of death a God of grace, “entirely other” than what he seemed to be in present history; a God being a friend, not an enemy of humans, beyond ideological constraints; and human life that aimed at resurrection, not death. The stubborn cause of Barth's post-Protestant International theology labeled dialectical and emerging in World War I, against the background of religious socialism, was to maintain this word – that death was not the last word; that all, especially European theology and culture, had on the contrary completely to be re-thought from the “eschaton” (ultimately the word of the resurrection). This was a great deal, but deceptively little for people who had projected an intriguing, liberal or revolutionary, path to a secular millennium; had had the dreams and frissons of the Belle Époque; and felt unable to embrace the small, modest steps to life to which a deeply humbled rethinking invited, if the mental and material damages had to be overcome. More obvious were confrontational discourses; of war by the revolutionary left and the counterrevolutionary right against interior class or race enemies. More fashionable for an academic community in post-War Germany was the sophisticatedly bewitching prose of the “Sein zum Tode” (being-toward-death) which the rising star in

⁶⁸ *Todesgang*, XXVIII.

philosophy Martin Heidegger promoted; or, for those who could afford it, simply a detached enjoyment of the culturally vibrant and cosmopolitan life in the Weimar Republic.

As a historian outside the guild who however possessed privileged access to archives, Lepsius did remarkable work in the last period of his life.⁶⁹ His main concern was to come to terms with contemporary history since the Berlin Congress, in particular with the World War and the murder of the Armenians – in short, with both the Armenian and the German Question. This was a very considerable challenge. In contrast to the main historiography after him at European universities, he included the Ottoman world as crucial for an understanding of European history. In 1919, he edited a large volume of sources entitled *Deutschland und Armenien 1914-1918*, and began to work, together with the professional historians Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Friedrich Thimme, on a large edition of German diplomatic documents. “One can not better characterize the purpose of the publication of German documents than by saying that their intention was to excavate the entire root network of the World War in the decades before the disaster, and expose the course of the giant roots from which grew out of the ash tree of the War.”⁷⁰ Lepsius' attention remained fixed upon the Belle Époque and its stupefying catastrophe which he worked hard to understand. The document edition of ultimately 54 volumes⁷¹ remains a basic instrument for historians of Belle Époque diplomacy today, whereas the edited sources of *Deutschland und Armenien* had to be critically revised.⁷² Unrealized remained his idea to establish a general Armenian archive.⁷³

Lepsius' wish “to show the history of the last ten years in a completely objective representation to the whole world” was informed both by the myth of German innocence – the

⁶⁹ “Aus heutiger Sicht heben Lepsius' Publikationen das Scheitern des Missionars und Politikers post mortem auf,” the historian Andreas Schulze wrote. “Orientmission und Weltpolitik. Johannes Lepsius und der europäische Imperialismus.” In: *Historie und Leben: der Historiker als Wissenschaftler und Zeitgenosse: Festschrift für Lothar Gall zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. D. Hein et al. (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006), 454.

⁷⁰ Johannes Lepsius, *Die Wurzeln des Weltkrieges: auf Grund der neuen Bismarck-Akten dargestellt* (München: Süddeutsche Monatshefte, 1922), 136.

⁷¹ *Die grosse Politik der Europäischen Kabinette 1871-1914: Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes*, im Auftrage des Auswärtigen Amtes hg. von Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Johannes Lepsius, Friedrich Thimme (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte), 1922-1927.

⁷² *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern 1915/16: Dokumente aus dem Politischen Archiv des deutschen Auswärtigen Amtes*, ed. Wolfgang Gust (Springe: Zu Klampen, 2005).

⁷³ As proposed in a letter to Herrn A. Karageusian, 295th Fifth Avenue New York, Potsdam 7 February 1925, LAH 1670.

Kriegsunschuldlegende so typical of the “Weimar consensus” – and the myth that a definitive and objective public historiography was possible. He early felt the danger of radicalizing German protagonists who considered previous politics as much too meek, wanted “to turn the tables” and argued that “we Germans will then be the aggressive nation and again turn the fortune.”⁷⁴ He could however not contribute to a substantial change of mind and mentality. Why? Insisting on representing German foreign policy since Bismarck as fundamentally peaceful,⁷⁵ he did not take the case of the Armenians – fright over the genocide together with the frank confession of co-responsibility, failed help and untruthfulness – as the lever for a German *metanoia*. Even if in a somewhat original interpretation one considered with Lepsius the Bagdadbahn as a genuinely peaceful project and true alternative to sea based imperialism, German failures in 1914 and 1915 were reason enough to engage in soul-searching without any complacency.

Lepsius' apologetics of the *Kaiserreich* were, of course, a response to indiscriminate anti-German accusations in the context of the Paris peace agreements. He attempted, firstly, to gain “a solid ground of historical facts, evacuating the debris of misunderstandings, mistakes and legends”; hopefully contributing to the “new construction of future policy in Germany,” as he wrote in a draft of an interview on the decision of the Weimar government to open the contemporary archives.⁷⁶ This unique openness he interpreted as an act of “unlimited trust in the reconciling and healing power of truth.” Full faith in this courageous and innovative opening was however lacking. Neither he nor the German Foreign Office – nor anyone else? – was then ready to expose without reserve their own history and politics to truth. For this reason, passages in the source collection of 1919, which shed a critical light on the Germans, were systematically omitted.⁷⁷ Although, as Wolfgang Gust has pointed out, these omissions were not Lepsius' but the Foreign Office's which provided him with copies of the originals, they corresponded to his general attitude. “Working very hard in the interest of my fatherland, I have now sacrificed four years of my life editing the German pre-War documents of the Foreign Office in order to squash, after the Armenian guilt lie, also the lie of German war guilt,” he wrote in 1923. In these lies he

⁷⁴ As he wrote in the context of Munich tribunal in behalf of “Eisnersche Aktenfälschung,” LAH 14568, cf. LAH 14390.

⁷⁵ Cf. Lepsius, *Die Wurzeln des Weltkrieges*, in particular 130. His friends in Basel criticized his dealing with history, especially his panegyric of Bismarck; otherwise they continued supporting him (cf. Oeri to Lepsius on 8 July 1922, LAH 13522).

⁷⁶ LAH 14567.

⁷⁷ See Wolfgang Gust's “Revidierte Lepsius-Edition” on www.armenocide.de.

included “the world lie of the moral indifference of German Christianity when faced with the annihilation of the Armenian people and of the German government's co-guilt for the deportations and massacres.”⁷⁸

Sweeping allegations – or, in his words, “the world lie that [the German government] had inspired and staged the Armenian deportation and massacres” – hurt his patriotic heart so deeply that he could not maintain his calm and necessary distinctions which he himself knew very well. In his mission journal *Der Orient*, the successor of *Der Christliche Orient*, he wrote in 1920 that “the painful fact that our Turkish ally exploited the ‘opportunity’ to exterminate a Christian people” entailed “on us an unintentional joint guilt.” In a private letter of the same year he considered “us as jointly guilty for the worst murder of Christians in history, because we cannot evade the responsibility for crimes our ally has committed, though against our will and despite our protests.”⁷⁹ This was or could have been a meaningful and mordant starting point for new departures.

Lepsius was wrong in publicly denying a joint guilt though right in denying the causal guilt of the German government. Insisting on righteousness, he blended the questions of joint guilt for war and of co-responsibility for the murder of the Armenians together and answered both categorically in the negative – instead of taking the German experience of the Armenian genocide as a strong lever for exposing a deeper layer of failure. In an unfortunate, useless and unneeded identification with the old state and its representatives, he did not invest his exceptional insight and talent for propagating a more humble self orientation – even pleading to overlook unfair allegations and injustices of the victors, because times would change. A similar vein of self-righteousness led Lepsius to disqualify Kurt Eisner's confession of German war guilt as utopian, millennialist and foggyish.⁸⁰ In another argument on Eisner however he avowed himself to have also become “a pacifist in the search of the possibility that a different world order appear at the horizon.”⁸¹ He read Marx. In a letter to his wife he called Marx a “one-eyed cyclops,” at the same time “the only one to have counted on the big jump over the gap;” and correct “as far as the

⁷⁸ Copy of a letter to the executive of the Deutsche Hilfsbund für christliches Liebeswerk im Orient, LAH 13311.

⁷⁹ *Der Orient* 1920 No. 8/9, 45; letter to Paul Wigand of 12 January 1920, LAH 15820.

⁸⁰ LAH 14568. After having, like Parvus and other misled revolutionary socialists, vehemently propagated a war of annihilation against Tsarist Russia in 1914, Eisner turned a pacifist in 1915; he was shot in 1919 by a völkisch nationalist.

⁸¹ Because the “immediate intuition,” he argued, shows to any Gospel reader “the dissens between the sens of Jesus and the dogm of the bellum justum among all great Christian churches.” LAH 14568.

basement was concerned. [...] Nothing was to be said against the abolishment of dwellings in basements and rear buildings – except that the superior flats not be demolished and all people moved to the basement.”⁸²

What about Lepsius' own millennium talk, so frequent in the early 1900s? His Christian hope for this world had strangely moved to a distant, shadowy future; a linguistic abyss gaped between the pre- and the post-World War periods. The Protestant International's vocabulary of millennium, kingdom of Christ and Zion was overshadowed by the war experience and hard to reconceptualize. The terms confused. Lepsius' previous transnational Christian language seemed strangely inapt to project the future. Implicitly questioning his formerly proud references to the Reformation, he postulated a “deeper rooted religion” similar to that of the Quakers, the only ones to have remained loyal to the spirit of Christ in the 1910s.⁸³ In another letter he alleged a fundamental difference between on the one hand the “messianic imperialism” of the prophets and the apocalyptical authors (whom he had previously cherished) and an imperialism allegedly inherited by the British Empire, and on the other hand the Gospel of Jesus Christ that he considered tied as closely to “nation” as “anti-Christianism was tied to imperialism.”⁸⁴ There was an argument – but in the middle of theological confusion. Lepsius' Christ had quit this world after he had left the Paris Peace Conference, as a foreigner who annoyed everybody: this is the conclusion of Lepsius' short satirical piece *Jesus at the Peace Conference*.⁸⁵ There again was an argument; and it could be meaningfully linked to Metzger and Turcholsky's World War dictum of Europe's “moratorium on the Sermon on the Mount.” But vision was lacking, both pragmatic and millennial. As far as the political world was concerned, Christ had apparently gone. Aporia with regard to Germany reigned in and around Johannes Lepsius – an impressive and largely valid work on history, grim humored arguments on present affairs, and nostalgia of the Hohenzollern dynasty did all not conceal this fact.⁸⁶

⁸² Long letter of February 1919 from Switzerland to his wife (LAH 14565); thanks to Hermann Goltz for having drawn my attention to this letter.

⁸³ In a letter of 5 May 1923 to his British Quaker friend James Rendel Harris, LAH 1501.

⁸⁴ In a letter of 2 December 1922 to his university friend Albert Weckesser, LAH 1555). Members of the pietist Hülfsbund were better able to keep distance from German World War politics and at the same time to maintain their hope of Jesus' supranational reign, cf. Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede*, 359 und 379.

⁸⁵ Johannes Lepsius, *Jesus at the Peace conference* (The Hague: n.p., 1919), 16.

⁸⁶ Cf. Age Meyer Benedictsens letter to his wife of 26 May 1924. He had visited Lepsius in Potsdam in 1924. Katri Meyer Benedictsens (ed.), *Åge Meyer Benedictsens: De Undertrykte Nationers Tolk*, vol. 2,

The Armenian genocide could have been a tremendous lesson in Interwar Germany; to point at the main culprit did however not suffice. Germany had “lost its soul” in summer 1915. At issue was not first to declaim “a mea culpa,” but to grasp the lack of resistance against and response to unexpected, but expectable mass crime next door whose victims were humans for whom European diplomacy in 1878 in Berlin and again in February 1914, this time with central German involvement, had guaranteed security and future. To grasp this would have been a peculiarly German answer to the Armenian experience, and in part also an answer to the German question. “We are not only at the nadir of our own nation, but also the lowest level of international political morality,” Lepsius commented in 1922, again pointing at others.⁸⁷ Nevertheless he was right. Western diplomacy condoned in 1922–23 at the conference of Lausanne the ethno-nationalistic rationale of the extermination in Asia Minor. “Turkey for the Turks,” Lepsius concluded with a grim sense of irony, represented “the formula, that at long last was ultimately found for all present and future irredentists in Europe, Asia and Africa: the victors evacuate after their victory the territories they have conquered thus finishing off all conflicts of religion and race. *Artificial migration is the recipe of the policy of and for the future.*”⁸⁸ The (tacit) international endorsement of comprehensive policies of expulsion and extermination was in fact to become the formative bridge from a Wilhelminian Germany on the whole deeply embarrassed by the genocide committed by its junior partner, to a Nazi Germany that approved of and adopted genocide. The both under-discussed and wrongly discussed German experience of the Armenian catastrophe, above all however the morally devastating “paradigm of Lausanne” impeded the building up of relevant resistance.

Despite his authentic insights, universal references and transnational network, Lepsius was not able or in a position frankly to approach and articulate German joint guilt and failure, either with regard to the origins of the World War or with regard to the Armenian issue. But if Lepsius could not, how could have the average German done? Even the Protestant International, Lepsius' transnational backbone since his stay in Jerusalem in the 1880s, fell publicly silent on the

Kopenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag 1935, 156 f. Thanks to Matthias Bjornlund for drawing my attention to and translating me this letter.

⁸⁷ LAH 1555.

⁸⁸ *Der Orient* 1922, 101, italics in the original.

Armenian question, its genocidal “answer” and the grave consequences this implied for the projection of the future. As an investigative journalist, a historian and a voice of truth Johannes Lepsius did a magnificent public job. Future-oriented answers to his two main questions together with a full implementation of his approach to expose both “to the reconciling and healing power of truth” he was not granted. The approach itself however was to remain valid.